United Nations E/CN.6/2015/NGO/170

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 January 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by New Japan Women's Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-65919 (E) 150115

Please recycle

Statement

Since 1962, with its 150,000 members working nationwide, the New Japan Women's Association has been committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, rights of women and children, and global solidarity of women for peace.

For the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, the Association, with other women's groups, presented opinions on the draft Platform for Action, and organized at the Non-Governmental Organization Forum workshops on three themes: "Realities of Working Women", "Japanese Military Comfort Women", and "World without Nuclear Weapons". It has participated in review and follow-up processes of the Being Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action.

2015 is the 70th year of the end of Japan's war of aggression, of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of women's suffrage in Japan. The United Nations will celebrate its 70th anniversary, hold the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and define the Post-2015 Development Agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals.

In order to contribute to advancing women's rights and gender equality in Japan, as well as to achieving a peaceful, just and sustainable world, the Association presents its view on major issues, their causes and solutions.

Shift away from neoliberal economic policies to create a society where both women and men can live humanly

Japan ranks at 105th under the Global Gender Gap Index. A factor keeping Japan in low position in terms of gender equality is the economic disparities between men and women.

Between 1995 and 2013, Japan has seen the increase of women in employment from 20.48 million to 24.06 million; and of the dual-earner households, from 9.08 million to 10.65 million. But 55.8 per cent of working women are in non-regular employment and 60 per cent of female workers exit the workforce after giving birth to their first child still today. Women with full-time jobs earn 70 per cent of what men workers receive, and the pay gap widens to 50 per cent if non-regular workers are included. Women raising children are paid 40 per cent of men, the lowest level among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. Forty-three per cent of female workers are "working poor", who earn 2 million yen or less a year. While 80 per cent of single mothers have jobs, the poverty rate of working single-parent families reaches 54 per cent. Shockingly, the child poverty rate hits the record high of 16.3 per cent, topping the national average of 16.1. Due to the wage disparities and reduced social security, more than 50 per cent of the elderly women live below poverty line. In Japan, a world economic power, poverty is increasing and women are hindered from becoming economically independent.

This situation is attributed to the financial circle's neoliberal strategy backed up by Government policies. They have increased low-paid and unstable non-regular workers with no rights, while adversely revising the social security system to deepen poverty and to widen the gap between rich and poor. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo keeps speaking of "utilizing female power" and a "society where women shine" and his cabinet approved a bill on promoting women's active participation.

However, their aim is to make the best use of women as "resources" for "growth strategy", and the bill lacks concrete measures to redress the pay gap and to eliminate discrimination against women, including through increasing full-time employment and establishing equal treatment of all workers. It is unacceptable that the Government intends to amend the Worker Dispatch Law to lift regulations on the use of temporary agency workers, which will undermine the very basis for working women to be self-reliant.

The Association calls on the Government to implement all the recommendations from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and to display political will to break with the neoliberal strategy and to adopt policies that will guarantee equal opportunities and human rights for all.

Ban and eliminate nuclear weapons and reduce military spending to achieve a peaceful, just and sustainable world

The Government of Japan glorifies the war of aggression and aims to make Japan a war-waging nation. It intends to revise the Constitution, targeting at repealing Article 9, which declares renunciation of war, no possession of war potential and denial of the right to belligerency. It has already enacted the Designated Secrets Protection Law, Japan's exercise of the right to collective self-defense, lifting bans on arms exports, drastically increased military spending, and is forcing through the new military base construction in Okinawa despite the opposition from the majority of the people.

Japanese women are voicing for peace. In all opinion polls women by majority support Article 9, opposing the Designated Secret Protection Laws and the right to collective self-defense.

Calling for the start of negotiations on banning nuclear weapons to be agreed at the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the Association is redoubling its efforts to gather signatures in support of the "Appeal for a Total Ban on Nuclear Weapons," a petition endorsed by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. We aim to collect 2 million signatures to present to the Conference.

Any use of nuclear weapons, whether by accident or by intention, could destroy human beings, communities and nature in an instant. The understanding that nuclear weapons cannot be "deterrence" and their existence itself is a threat to humanity is gaining support, and at the United Nations First Committee in October 2014, a joint statement on humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons signed by 155 countries was presented, calling for banning the use of and eliminating these weapons. The Association believes that the driving force of this development is the movement carried forward by the civil society together with the Hibakusha, Atomic bomb survivors, who have been voicing that nuclear weapons and humans cannot coexist.

The Japanese Government relies on the "nuclear umbrella" of the United States under the security treaty between the two countries, taking a position unbefitting of the atomic bombed country. It is also grave that the Government is pushing the restart and export of nuclear reactors, although it has not been able to effectively deal with the radiation contamination problem caused by the accident at Fukushima power plant.

Enormous money is being spent in developing and producing nuclear weapons. The world's military expenditure in 2013 is estimated to be $1.747 trillion. All this money should be redirected to education, welfare and other human needs, which will help to eradicate causes of conflict such as poverty and hunger. The international community needs the money to tackle climate change as well. The Association underscores that agreement on banning and eliminating nuclear weapons will be a big step forward to change security discourse toward establishing peaceful solution-first security policies.

Resolve the issue of Japanese military "comfort women" to end sexual violence

To settle the issue of Japanese military "comfort women" is to restore dignity of the women who were forced into "sex slaves" and suffered the damage of serious human rights violation and war crimes. It is also proof that Japan squarely faces its war responsibility, committing itself to addressing human rights violation and never to repeat the same mistake. Without doing so, Japan cannot earn trust from the international community.

However, the Government has refused to listen to the survivor's voices or to implement the recommendations from the various human rights bodies. Taking advantage of misinformation published in a major newspaper, Prime Minister, Cabinet members and many other political figures are now trying to deny the legitimacy of the "Kono Statement", in which the Government admitted the Japanese military's involvement, and the Government even requested Radhika Coomaraswamy, former United Nations Deputy Secretary General, to partially revise the 1996 United Nations Commission on Human Rights report on Japan's wartime sexual slavery system, which is totally unacceptable.

As the women's group of the perpetrator country, the Association urges the Government to resolve the issue immediately. We continue efforts to pass the historic facts on to the next generations.

Twenty years have passed since Beijing. Agreements and commitments are in place. The New Japan Women's Association calls on all Member States to implement their commitments for "gender equality, peace and development" and act to realize a peaceful, just and sustainable world.